

THE LONELY YEARS

By May Elsie Barrett

(Copyright, 1916, W. G. Chapman.)

All the town agreed that Arnold Gresham was Lucy Lane's last chance and that she might be thankful she had it. At 36 proposals may be common enough, but not in small towns among domesticated people. After 30, as a rule, they are either married or confirmed bachelors and spinsters.

Arnold Gresham had come back from the metropolis, where he had gone ten years before, as a young man. He had come back with a comfortable capital, to take charge of a large produce business. He was a gentleman and handsome. It was certainly a good chance for Lucy.

Among those who had ventured to hint at what was expected to be announced was Dorothy Field. Five years younger than Lucy, she had never been a close friend of hers. Yet she had come in and taken the elder woman by the hands and gravely, very gravely, said:

"I hope you and Arnold will be very happy."

And Lucy remembered vague talk about a one-time passion between the two. She had wondered; she had been troubled.

"Don't make the mistake I—the mistake so many women make," Dorothy had continued. "Don't—don't let your pride—"

Suddenly she had burst into tears and run out of the house. And Arnold, coming in, had met Dorothy at the gate.

That was all. It had happened a week before and Lucy had seen Arnold several times since. They were discussing the announcement. Lucy had not loved Arnold so very much until he asked her to marry him; she had even wondered whether she would accept him; but when he spoke she felt a rush of tenderness

in her heart and she knew that she loved Arnold with all her soul.

He had been just the same since that evening, and yet — Lucy wondered whether she had really divined that the old passion for Dorothy had been stirred again. Or whether it was imagination.

She left the house and walked down the leafy street, still musing. Arnold was to call that night and



Suddenly She Stopped Dead

they were to make the arrangements. There were two hours, and a sense of the irrevocable nature of the impending meeting came strongly over the woman. Mingled with this, and with the wonder about Dorothy, came a vague sense of futility. She had been engaged twice before, in girlhood, and each time it had been broken off by her. When Ar-